

March 25, 2018      Testimony      John 19:16b-24

The word Gospel has come to be a synonym for the word truth. Literally, it means the good news, or the glad tidings. For people like us who follow Jesus, the good news is the story of salvation. Jesus is the way. Each of the four gospel accounts tell us the story of Jesus, as the testimony of a single believer who has become involved in spreading the word, that Jesus saves. Given all those details the question continually arises why is the story not uniform, and exactly the same? The question is a simple one and so is the answer. Matthew and John were disciples in the sense they were involved in that inner circle of the 12. Mark was a relative of Peter. Luke was a physician who spent the balance of his life accompanying and attending to the medical needs of Paul. The accounts vary in detail. They are uniform in the claims they make about Jesus. And each account leads to the singular details, that Jesus was crucified, dead and buried and rose on the third day....Sunday.

Each account includes details that are not in the others. That is because they are personal testimonies. Matthew addressed a specific audience. Mark was to some extent, as a teenager telling the story based on his uncle Peter's experience. Luke is the careful researcher who only used material he either witnessed, or that came from people who were there. He did not set out to do this, but Luke set a whole new standard for the accuracy of historical accounts. And John as we have seen over the last few weeks followed Jesus, was

known to Caiaphas, the high priest and therefore...was permitted to witness things that others did not, or could not. A first person account of what happened is still known to us as testimony. This is not only true in the church of Jesus Christ, it is reflected in our legal system. If you remember the tv drama Dragnet...Joe Friday was only interested in the facts when he spoke with those who had witnessed a crime. That is a gift the four gospels bequeath to what we call western culture.

So here we are dealing with John's testimony concerning the trial of Jesus before the Roman Procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate. John was present in the crowd. John watched. John was a unique witness to what was said. John saw what was done. It is with singular authority that John tells us when Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified, his military detail took charge of Jesus. The soldiers made Jesus carry the cross. John saw it happen. John walked the road of sorrows, He witnessed what he testifies to here in this account.

There destination that day was Golgotha. Or at least that is what it was called in Aramaic. In Greek it was called Calvary. Regardless of what language you use it translates as the place of the skull...a dome of rock which resembled a bald pate. There were features which with a little imagination appeared to be the sockets for eyes. It was a place where death was no stranger. It was not a pleasant place to be. And yes...it was a spooky place. When they arrived at the place Calvary, Golgotha, the place of the skull, they crucified Jesus.

Jesus was not the only victim. Three who had been given this sentence were crucified. Jesus is in the middle on the center cross.

This next detail is important. It's significance relates to the trial Pilate conducted and John witnessed. It relates to the crucifixion at Golgotha. And it relates to what happened on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, what we call Easter Sunday. Pilate had a notice prepared and it was fastened to the cross on which Jesus died. "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." The I.D. document for this specific prisoner was posted in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. Aramaic was a local dialect of Hebrew, so it could be read by the Jews who were present, and who walked by this crucifixion site. It was written in Latin because that was the language of the Empire centered in Rome. It was written in Greek because in the time of Jesus and Pontius Pilate Greek was the language of international commerce.

John tells us the chief priests, the business committee, of the Rabbinical Council of Jerusalem objected to the wording. They wanted Pilate to have that notice rewritten, stating that Jesus claimed to be the King of the Jews. Pilate has not had a good day. If Pilate had had his way, he would have set Jesus free. He lost a high stakes poker game involving the flexing of political muscle. He has been cornered into ordering the crucifixion of Jesus. It is at this point that Pilate gets stubborn. He is the Procurator of Judea. He simply refuses to have the notice reworded. He has made it as plain as he could

that he saw no reason warranting Jesus death. It is his attempt to have the last word in the matter. He likes that the priests are upset at his choice of words. The notice is attached to Jesus cross as Pilate had ordered it written. He has no idea that he is making a statement about Jesus being the Messiah, that this notice is going to become his testimony.

John's testimony includes witnessing what happened to the clothes of Jesus. Four soldiers are involved in the work of the crucifixion. They each took a portion. Four shares...one for each of them. Where there was debate on this matter had to do with what we refer to as the robe of Jesus. It was woven in one piece. They recognized it immediately as a garment that was worth something. Each of them wanted it. So initially they set it to one side. When they are ready they choose a way of giving each man a chance at this fine piece of cloth. They gamble for it. They may have drawn straws. They may have rolled dice. The result was winner take all. They have no idea that centuries before they were born, King David, the greatest King ancient Israel had, had written a praise song that foretold this moment. Psalm 22. We read it responsively this morning. Verse 18 John tells us describes what the Roman soldiers did, to a T. It ought not to surprise us...that that section of Psalm 22 so accurately describes the agony of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Testimony is a loaded word in this time in which we are living. We may well translate it as the emotionally charged telling of how a person became a believer in Jesus. John is

certainly telling us his experience of being called to follow Jesus, and the things he heard and saw as a result. There can be no question that what he heard and saw caused him to believe Jesus. Jesus was wise, impressively wise. Jesus was impressively faithful. A good man, especially when you remember he said, "No one is good, save God." He was impressive. The way Jesus died, was to save sinners. People have been telling their story of coming to Jesus ever since.

Never doubt, that this is the heart of the testimony we find in each and all of the gospels. Whatever else Jesus said and did, he did this. He chose to go to Jerusalem in the season of the Passover. He chose to go there saying that HE knew HE would die there, and rise to life again on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. HE said it. And HE did it. Here is my testimony. Hallelujah! Praise be to God. These are the facts!

Let us pray;

Lord we give thanks for the reality of YOUR saving us from our sin. We are moved by the story of the crucifixion. We are amazed by the testimony to resurrection. We proclaim with soldiers and saints throughout the ages. Surely this man was the Son of God! Make our faith stronger. Make our service Holy. Claim us for eternity, in Jesus name. Amen